

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control School Dental Prevention Program Description



In 2000 the Surgeon General, in his report “Oral Health in America”, gave Americans a wake-up call concerning the oral health of its people. While his reference to the “silent epidemic” of dental disease took many individuals by surprise, it was not a surprise to many dedicated professionals and parents in South Carolina who had worked tirelessly trying to improve the oral health of South Carolina’s children. The stakeholders, under the leadership of Dr. Ray Lala, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control’s (DHEC’s) Oral Health Director, established public-private partnerships to address this epidemic and to improve the oral health of South Carolina.

State Summits-Bringing the Players Together

In April of 2001, the “Breaking Barriers: Access to Oral Health” summit brought together representatives from state agencies, university medical and dental programs, advocacy groups, oral health practitioners and other health care professions to finalize the major oral health policy priorities that were identified by the SC team participating in the 2000 National Governors’ Association Oral Health Policy Academy. At the conclusion of the April summit, the workgroups endorsed five priority areas: policy and advocacy, prevention and education, dental work force development, dental public health infrastructure development, and improved access to oral health services.

The “Healthy Smiles for South Carolina” summit was convened in November 2001 to discuss policy recommendations needed to address these priorities. Under the facilitation of Lynn Hammond, Director of the South Carolina Healthy Schools Project at the State Department of Education and Karren Gordon, Director of the Children’s Oral Health Coalition, the school-based dental disease prevention workgroup finalized the South Carolina “School-Based Dental Prevention Program Guidelines.”

The Partnership Moves Forward

In February of 2002 the Children’s Oral Health Coalition formally endorsed the creation of the Healthy Smiles Partnerships for school-based dental prevention programs. On March 4, 2002 The South Carolina Dental Association, The South Carolina Dental Hygiene Association, the State Department of Education, and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control joined together to issue a statement of endorsement for public/private partnerships to provide school based dental services to students. The purpose of this collaborative effort is to increase dental health services for students with the involvement of dental health providers, educators, and policy makers.

Memorandum of Agreement with Providers for School-Based Dental Prevention Services

DHEC has established a program in which a private provider may enter a Memorandum of Agreement with DHEC to provide school-based services at the local level. As part of the agreement with DHEC, they are required to operate their programs within the “School-Based Dental Prevention Program Guidelines.” In the 2004-05 school year the partners provided preventive dental services to over 40,000 students. DHEC continues to encourage the participation of additional providers.

2003 Dental Practice Act Changes

The DHEC School Dental Prevention Program believes that the 2003 amendments to the Dental Practice Act reflect the intent of the state to support dental public health activities through DHEC by providing the mechanism for dental hygienists to provide preventive services for underserved populations, without prior examination by a dentist. Documentation of the school program consists of an agreement between DHEC and private providers to deliver dental preventive services in economically targeted schools, Guidelines on School-Based Dental Programs, and Standing Orders for Dental Hygienists.

Schools Eligible to Participate with the DHEC School Dental Prevention Program

The schools eligible for participation in this program are those with 50 percent or higher enrollment in the reduced/free lunch program and/or Medicaid eligible students as reported by The Office of Research and

Statistics of the SC Budget and Control Board. Preventive dental services may be delivered in a school on this list as part of the DHEC SDPP partnership program. Any services delivered in a school not meeting the qualifying criteria are not part of the DHEC dental public health program and according to the State Board of Dentistry require a dentist examination prior to service delivery.

The Future of the DHEC School Dental Prevention Program

The ultimate goal of the DHEC SDPP is to improve oral health in SC by striving to meet the national Healthy People 2010 objective that states that 50% of 6-8 year olds will have at least one permanent molar sealant in place. The 2002 SC Oral Health Needs Assessment revealed that while one-third of the children screened had untreated decay only about 20% of third grade students had a sealant in place. Continued expansion of this program in the targeted schools will also help reduce the racial and economic oral health disparities revealed in the Needs Assessment. Our goals are to achieve the stated objectives through this program, and to increase opportunities to serve the oral health needs of the people of South Carolina through the dental public health program.

SCDHEC School Dental Prevention Programs are:

- Bright Smiles for Little Scholars
- Carol Drum Project
- Communicare - Smiles for a Lifetime
- Communities Caring For Children-Ronald McDonald Care Mobile
- Mobile Dental Care
- Health Promotion Specialists
- Little River Medical Center
- Smiletown

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